Save My Game

Clashing Concepts

By Jason Nelson-Brown

This column provides advice for DMs whose campaigns are in trouble. Do your players constantly bicker or complain about issues both inside and outside of the main campaign action? Do your best ideas fall flat? Have you set up a situation that you now wish you hadn't? Worry no more, because Jason Nelson-Brown has the answers to save your game!

Problem: Conflicting Visions

My problem is that in my town there aren't a lot of people to play with, and the person that I usually DM for has refused to play my campaign because I won't let him be an outlandish creature. What do you do when players refuse to play your campaigns because they want to be a certain thing? -- **witchhunter99, from the Wizards message boards**

To resolve this problem, one of you is going to have to change his stance. Otherwise, neither of you is going to have a game -- at least not with each other, which is a shame if you're friends.

I've lived in small towns, and games aren't always easy to come by. Then again, when I was younger, most kids in junior high and high school had played **D&D** at some point. Twenty-five years later, players are more skewed across the demographic range -- of course, always check the Gamer Classifieds to find a gaming group near you. I'm 35, and most of the people I game with are older than me (except when I DM for my kids, of course!). Finding people whose age, personality, gaming style, and (perhaps most importantly) location and schedule are a fit for you is not always easy.

To solve your problem, you have a couple of options.

However, if you don't care for that model, you can certainly put more emphasis on the base classes for your campaign. If you prefer that option, here are several points you might want to consider.

Solution 1: Role Reversal

Let your buddy DM for a while. As DM, he can play all the outlandish creatures he likes! Getting inside the minds and habits of an endless array of opponents and exotic locations and conditions and situations is a big part of the fun of DMing. Maybe your friend is a budding DM just waiting to get out and stretch his wings. Besides, it would be an opportunity for you to play some weirdo creatures and find out what the attraction is.

Solution 2: Take Turns Being the Boss

Since you're at an impasse, you might try letting him play an anarchic, warforged, half-xorn harpy wild mage or whatever, for a set amount of time and then doing it your way for a month. You could do this by either running two separate campaigns -- one with weird characters and one with more typical characters -- or by having him switch characters every month within the same campaign.

Your friend wants to play weirdos and you say no, but have you ever actually tried to DM a game like that? Maybe a game with satyrs, wemics, aspis, tabaxi, and vegepygmies as PCs might be fun, and you'd like to continue it!

Then again, it might be lame, so that your friend decides it's not as much as he expected.

Solution 3: Do Your Homework

You and your friend need to talk about the reasons why he wants to play with weird creatures and you don't. What exactly is it that appeals to him about them, and what do you find distasteful? You may find a space for common ground on the issue or a way to make it work.

Look carefully at the rules for nonstandard creatures so you can see how they are handled and ways that you may want to tweak things. What racial abilities do you not want to deal with? What adjustments would you want to make to official monsters to make them playable in your campaign as PC races? Find out specifically what character your buddy wants to play and then start negotiating specifically how it will function. Or maybe he'd be willing to play something similar, but slightly less outlandish, that wouldn't bother you so much. Perhaps you can agree on one that's 'normal' enough for you but exotic enough for him.

Finally, encourage the player to think about how he would role-play an exotic and alien creature in typical game situations so that it's not just a regular guy in a funny suit with cool racial abilities.

Solution 4: Bide Your Time

Some things just don't work. If the impasse is insurmountable, instead of playing, you could get your gaming fix by writing up campaign material for that great campaign that you *will* start when the right gaming group comes down the road. Draw your maps, build your kingdoms, sift through all those ten billion feats and spells in that stack of gaming books or your online favorites (just look at the feats consolidated list or the spells list (coming soon!) and decide which ones will make the cut into your campaign. Create dynamic and interesting NPCs, carefully crafted adventure locales, and rich and detailed treasure hoards. These could be just for your own use, or you could pitch them to *Dungeon, Dragon*, and similar publications. In the olden days, we used to use the charts in the back of the AD&D *Dungeon Master's Guide* to play solo **D&D** by randomly generating dungeons, traps, and monsters. No plot, no real interaction, but many old-time gamers whiled away their evenings and weekends (and study halls) drawing dungeons and staging gladiator contests.

Solution 5: Find Some New Friends

If you and your buddy just can't resolve this, and you can't face another day staring at your reflection in the dice,

then it's time to start pounding the pavement in search of new players. It's not easy, but it's a lot easier now via the internet than it was in the past. If you have a local shop that deals in games, hobby materials, or comic books, ask around there or post a notice near the entrance advertising your game. Inquire with a librarian (school, college, or public library) about whether any gamers meet there -- many libraries have a **D&D** Library Program. Talk to teachers or advisers at your school about starting a **D&D** club. Put an announcement in a neighborhood activity center, bulletin board, or newsletter.

Keep on the lookout for gaming conventions in your area. Big public events provide a chance to meet other gamers from nearby and plug into a network of players. You'll never be without a game again.

Along with these old-fashioned methods, you can sift the internet and gaming-related message boards, newsgroups, chat rooms, the Wizards forums, and other databases for players in your vicinity. If you join the RPGA network, you can access its player list to find people. You might find a group a town away, or a few blocks away, that you never knew existed.

About the Author

Jason Nelson-Brown lives in Seattle with his wife Kelle, daughters Meshia and Indigo, son Allen, and dog Bear. He is an active and committed born-again Christian who began playing **D&D** in 1981 and currently runs one weekly campaign while playing intermittently in two others.

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